Flower Language - or, Absent Memory

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Flower Language - or, Absent Memory

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Summary

Ten years after the events of *Red Dragon*, Will Graham receives a note on his doorstep. It contains a phone number. Only one person could be at the other end of the line.

Coriander

When he woke up just before dawn to the sound of a car's engine outside, Will Graham expected to find the aftermath of a robbery in his living room. Gun in hand, he went to the window, but the driveway was empty: only snow, and no tire tracks. He supposed he had been dreaming, but checked outside anyway, just in case.

That was when he found a bouquet of fresh coriander in front of his door, and below it, an envelope of thick parchment paper, with his name written in beautiful calligraphy.

Hannibal Lecter.

The chill he felt had nothing to do with the snowy breeze. Checking the horizon one last time, Will took the bouquet and the note into the house, and sat down with them at the kitchen table. *Coriander, in plant symbolism, represents lust.* He didn't know why he knew that, but the memory of the knowledge came to him from somewhere that his mind had long left alone. What would Lecter want from him, after all these years?

As far as Will knew, the man had disappeared with that FBI trainee, Starling, almost ten years ago. Will had last spoken to him during the investigation of the Dragon, and that had been even before the escape. Since that time, he had received birthday and Christmas gifts and one-sided correspondence from Lecter, always untraceable; the last two years, there had been nothing, and Will had wondered despite himself if Hannibal had lost interest in him. *Seems he hasn't.*

Coriander. Lust. Will poured himself a stiff drink before he opened the letter. He took a moment to breathe, and opened the paper.

A phone number was written neatly on the center of the page.

He picked up the phone, and took his time to dial it right.

~

The phone was ringing, ringing, for what seemed like several minutes, but Will knew it was only his fearful anticipation of someone answering that was giving him that impression. He struggled to calm his racing pulse, waiting for the other end of the line, half-hoping it wouldn't ever pick up, then --

"Will."

The voice was exactly the same as it was then. He barely managed to suppress a gasp. "H-hello, Doctor Lecter." Closed his eyes, kept his body still. "I've just received your gift. Thank you." He wasn't sure if he was really grateful, but it was only polite to express gratitude.

"Do you know why I sent you coriander, Will?"

"...in the flower language, it represents lust." His heart was racing again. No way to suppress it. Their conversations had always made Will uncomfortable. He kept his eyes closed.

"Don't feel embarrassed, Will. Embarrassment is for public affairs. In private, we would do better to drop the pretense of social standing, and express ourselves honestly, as I have done." Somehow, that reassured him. "I would not pretend the coriander meant anything else."

Will remained silent, but his pulse was slowing down again, settling into the familiar heightened awareness that had once been his usual. He had stopped consulting for the FBI since Hannibal's escape; with nothing else to do, fishing had calmed him. The silence now conveyed his understanding.

"Just as I will not pretend that we are not both alone, sitting in silent houses, with only each other for company." Which meant Clarice Starling was dead...or otherwise away.

He wondered aloud. "Then, that FBI trainee..."

"I grew bored of her."

Oh. "...How was the meat?"

"I didn't kill her." And that surprised him. "She is living happily in a monastery in southern France, and has no recollection of the past."

More silence on Will's end. "I had almost hoped to hear it wasn't good enough to eat." The uncomfortable truth was still the truth. Will picked up his glass and swirled the liquor idly; it was his way of fidgeting.

"I suspect it would not have been. Stomach cancer taints the quality of the adjacent organs."

"Does she know?"

"No." The soft smile that accompanied it was something Will felt, rather than heard.

There was something on the tip of Will's tongue, but he couldn't remember what he wanted to say. So he asked, "Was there something you wanted to talk about?"

Hannibal laughed softly, a sound that Will didn't remember hearing often. Yet he, too, smiled.

"I've always thought you and I existed on a level apart from the rest, Will. It seems that has persisted despite my absence." Will imagined Hannibal was sitting across from him at the table; in his mind's eye, they were sitting in the same places they'd been the first time they had dined together. *A little protein scramble to start the day.* Hannibal looked the same to Will as he had when they sat there before; Will firmly believed that the man never aged, only changed his appearance willingly to seem as though he did.

The Hannibal sitting across from him asked, "Do you remember the night you lost time, and woke up in my office?"

Rosemary

Chapter Summary

The story of that night.

Do you remember the night you lost time, and woke up in my office?

Will opened his eyes, and he was there, standing in the office waiting room. "I never fully remembered," he said quietly, as if to no one. In this imagined room, he was unconcerned with realism, so he spoke to the air and Hannibal's voice echoed uniformly everywhere. The muted glow of the lamps in the waiting room was easy on the eyes.

"You arrived at my office three hours before you woke up there." The scene faded into unclear darkness, and Will blinked in surprise, dispelling his self-made illusion to return to the kitchen.

Hannibal's tone of voice sounded a little odd. "I found you collapsed with an awful fever on the floor of the waiting room. You were completely unconscious, and as a friend, I knew I had to help you somehow. You were so weak, Will, so *vulnerable*." He lingered on that last word too long for Will's liking. Where was this going? He had a bad feeling about it.

"My lightest touch set you sobbing and shivering, as if the nightmare were harming you physically. I could not help you escape the monster, Will. I could only wait for you to awaken. But seeing you like that enticed my killing instinct. I...I wanted to consume you so *badly*." Will was feeling very nervous now, even though it had happened more than ten years ago, he was afraid of what he was going to learn.

"I wanted to *defile* you, Will. My self-restraint was crumbling. When I carried you upstairs, it was with carnal desire in mind, and that alone." *Wait. Hannibal wanted to have sex with him?* Something stirred within Will's gut that he couldn't identify. "You were bowed, body and mind, in supplication. It was more beautiful to me than the finest Renaissance masterpieces." Hannibal's voice was growing quieter as though he too were becoming embarrassed by the story. Will couldn't bear to tell Hannibal to stop speaking -- couldn't bear to lose contact with him again, despite himself.

"I bathed you in rosewater, brought your fever down to 100 degrees. Your hair was so soft under my hands." His mouth was forming the word *No*, but his voice was strangled by the need to know what Hannibal had done to him. Will couldn't remember it on his own.

"When I dried you off, I brought you to my bedroom." *No.* But he was remembering the decorations on the walls, the samurai armor and swords on the far wall.

"I restrained your wrists with one of my silk scarves." *Please, no.* "Your body was so perfect, Will, I thought later that it was a dream after all. I whispered to you while you were unconscious, told you how you delighted my spirit --" *and he remembered, remembered the voice, 'how I would love to consume your soul into my own...'* "I took my time with you, explored your body with my tongue, fantasizing about every bite I could have taken. You would sometimes flinch, as though awake, but you weren't yet."

Will's pulse was starting to jump and spark in his veins. He so desperately did not want to let Hannibal tell him more, wanted to cry out in fear and scream for Hannibal to be quiet, but if he did, Hannibal would never talk to him again, would never be this close. Will squeezed his eyes shut and kept listening, even as his eyes welled with tears. Hannibal was beginning to breathe sharply, and Will knew it was arousing him to tell this story again.

"I wanted you to receive my love," breathed Hannibal in Will's ear. It was as if the phone were not even there, as if Hannibal were right behind him, whispering. Will was choking back a scream for him to stop. "I used my finest olive oil, when I began to prepare you to receive me. Even through the fever, you moaned so *sweetly*. I had never expected you to moan for me..."

Will remembered the wet noises that his body had made when Hannibal was slipping fingers inside him, and *no please no* his involuntary gasps and moans when a fingertip rubbed his prostate, *please stop* and Hannibal was putting a pillow under his hips to hold him where he wanted.

"*You were so hot inside, Will,*" that was it, Will was trying not to let Hannibal hear him sobbing, it was such a painful memory, he was ashamed of himself for crying this much but it scared him to think of that night. "I was going to be gentle," *it hurts* "but every inch was so tight, I couldn't remain dignified about the pleasure you were giving me. I couldn't think clearly anymore. I lost myself in ecstasy."

Why was Hannibal even telling him this? Hannibal hesitated; then, "I'm sorry, Will. I was so rough with you then." And Will remembered that feeling then, and his voice cracked in a low moan that sent more tears down his cheeks. He remembered what Hannibal had spoken to him at the brink of orgasm, when their bodies were pressed so closely together, when every hard thrust made his full body tremble. *Feel me. Feel my love.*

The whiskey was left forgotten on the table. Will had sunk to the floor, sobbing openly now, as if it had just happened a moment ago. "*Why did you tell me this,*" he choked out between tears, "*why did you want me to know?*"

The line went dead. But he saw the front door opening. Saw the tall silhouette in the dawn light. Saw the man getting closer -- "No," Will moaned, "please --"

"...because once isn't enough."

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